

**Practices of Teacher Learning in Waldorf Schools: Some Recommendations
Based on Qualitative Inquiry**

Martyn P. Rawson
University of Plymouth, UK

Abstract *This study uses the theoretical lens of Kelly's (2006) socio-cultural notion of teacher learning to explore and interrogate such practices in the lived experiences of teachers in Waldorf schools. Data was gathered using questionnaires and interviews from some 160 teachers working with Steiner educational principles in Waldorf schools in 14 countries. Wherever possible, Waldorf schools practice educational autonomy, using forms of collegial and distributed school leadership. Drawing on the core principles of Steiner education and a curriculum based on a normative view of learning development, they seek to adapt their educational approach to the learning needs of their pupils in the local context. Collegial autonomy presumes teachers's ability to generate knowledge about their pupils's development and learning needs. The data highlights some strengths and weaknesses within teacher learning practices in Waldorf schools and outlines some implications for Waldorf teacher education. The socio-cultural perspective on teacher learning suggests developing a more coherent understanding of the importance of knowing-in-practice, identity work, reflection and practitioner research may strengthen the quality of the education; ensuring Steiner education continues to be a valuable form of educational counter practice.*

Keywords teacher learning, Steiner/Waldorf education, socio-cultural approach

Introduction

This study set out to explore the lived experiences of Waldorf teachers from a number of different countries of the practices of teacher learning in their schools. Teacher learning practices are the ways teachers systematically develop their professional knowledge and expertise. Some of these are individual, such as lesson preparation and review. Others are collegial, such as teachers's meetings, peer evaluation or pupil case studies. I wanted to explore their experiences of these practices. I asked them to assess how effective they felt they were in relation to their

Martyn P. Rawson
University of Plymouth, UK
martyn.rawson@plymouth.ac.uk

teacher learning, in order to establish if change is necessary. My experience of some 34 years as a Waldorf teacher suggested that this might be the case.

Waldorf schools around the world strive to be autonomous, in as much as the state education authorities permit this. They practice forms of collegial and distributed leadership (Rawson, 2011; Woods & Woods, 2008/2012), often referred to as dynamic delegation or mandating. This assumes that teachers are able to plan and assess their lessons on the basis of knowledge they generate about the development and learning needs of their pupils, in the given social and cultural context where the school is located (Gladstone, 1997; Rawson, 2010; Rawson & Swann, 2000). Waldorf teachers base their practice on

- guidelines provided by the Waldorf Curriculum (Rawson & Richter 2000),
- reference to Steiner's (1996a/1996b) ideal-typical model of the developmental tasks that children and young people face at various stages as they grow and mature and which are deemed to be normative rather than empirical (Zech, 2013),
- knowledge they have generated through study, reflection and research,
- adapting existing practice,
- national curricula or exam syllabus requirements.

A primary aspect of Waldorf teacher expertise is therefore being able to “read the needs” of their pupils in context and being able to plan, carry out and evaluate pedagogical activities. Developing this expertise through teacher learning is therefore a particularly important aspect of Steiner education. Indeed it is the main justification for claims to educational autonomy. Following Steiner's (1985) social theory, both responsibility and accountability for educational practice should be located at the school level within a college of teachers on the grounds that they are best placed to understand the learning needs of their pupils (Steiner, 1996a). Overall educational quality in all schools should be regulated within civil society by educational institutions (Dahlin, 2010).

The theory, practice and history of autonomy in Waldorf schools have been most thoroughly elucidated by Götte (2006). He concluded that the Waldorf collegial model has proven itself to be remarkably robust since 1919. It provides a rare example of partial educational autonomy—partial because all schools are regulated to some extent. The model is under pressure from the global trend towards standardized curricula with prescribed and measurable outcomes, aimed primarily at the acquisition of competences related to the perceived requirements of the globalized economy (Halász & Michel, 2011). Ball (2008/2012) has shown how this trend is driven by policy technologies of standardization, performativity and managerialism in connection with the globalized neo-liberal colonization of

educational policy. In spite of such trends, Waldorf schools remain a lively, viable form of other education that strives to serve human and social development rather than what the state assumes to be the needs of the economy. It is at least debatable whether the economy isn't actually better served by the outcomes of an autonomous education sector committed to a human-centred and critical *Bildung*—that is, the self-formation of the person in the context of civil society—as a number of authors have recently argued (e.g., Lenzen, 2014; Nida-Rümelin, 2013; Rittelmeyer, 2012; Steinkellner, 2012).

A further challenge to Waldorf practice is the rapidly changing context of what Bauman (2007) has called liquid modernity, a set of fluid conditions in which no social structures are solid, stable or permanent. In Bourdieuan (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) terms, the structuring structures no longer keep their own shape for long and are no longer expected to do so. Following Bauman, the social structures that shape and limit individual choices, the social institutions that instill values, routines and patterns of acceptable behaviour, that serve as frames of reference for human actions, or offer social security and welfare, have either become fluid or disappeared (Bauman, 2007). Serres (2013), for example, compares the magnitude of current social changes brought by the virtual revolution to those of the so-called Neolithic Revolution, when human societies first became sedentary and urbanized. He also notes that current educational institutions were designed for a previous age and are therefore now, entirely anachronistic. The educational implication of this is that many aspects of human development, identity and learning are in a state of flux and thus pedagogy has to continuously adapt.

A third factor is the rapid growth of the Waldorf movement in China, India and Asia generally but also in the Charter and Public Waldorf School movement within the US (Rawson, 2014). These new contexts challenge Steiner education to recreate its practices and not simply to reproduce existing (frequently Western, and even Middle European) traditions and models. The issue of creative renewal also affects Germany, the country with the largest number of Waldorf schools (da Veiga, 2006; da Veiga & Randall, 2013).

At the core of each of these challenges is the quality of teacher learning. In order to be accountable in an age of (largely) justifiable quality assurance, schools need to have robust processes of research and evaluation (Brater, 2013; Rawson, 2008/2010/2011) and the basis of these is teacher learning. If Steiner education is to grow and renew itself, it cannot simply reproduce existing practice, but must develop new practice, which also means understanding how that practice affects the learning and development of the pupils. In this sense teacher learning is crucial to the Waldorf project.

This study uses the theoretical lens of Kelly's (2006) socio-cultural notion of teacher learning to interrogate the data. Every theoretical model is like a net thrown over part of the life world and as such it captures certain aspects but not others.

What the socio-cultural perspective captures offers an analysis that has thus far been missing from the Steiner Waldorf discourse.

Theoretical Frames

The socio-cultural notion of teacher learning, as outlined by Kelly (2006), describes the processes by which teachers move from being novices, towards having expertise. Expertise is defined by Eraut (2000) as an intuitive grasp of pedagogical situations based on deep tacit knowledge, in which the practitioner no longer relies on rules or guidelines and only uses analytic approaches in novel situations when problems arise. The expert has a vision of what is possible (Eraut, 2000, p. 23). Kelly (2006, p. 514) notes that the notion of teacher learning acknowledges that expert teachers have a productive relationship with knowledge in and of practice, exemplified by critical reflective practice and usage of teacher research. However, teacher learning also involves full participation in social settings such as classrooms and includes “minute by minute decision making...[involving] knowing-in-practice, a distributed and dynamic process resulting from collaborative actions of teachers and students together” (Kelly, 2006, p. 514) in the unique contexts of their work.

Knowing-in-practice is a modification of Schön’s (1983) notion of knowledge-in-practice, the knowledge inherent in the artful practice of professionals that is sometimes called “thinking on one’s feet.” Schön distinguished between reflection-in-practice in which the practitioner calls upon a repertoire of theories in use, intuition, images and metaphors to engage in unique situations and reflection-on-practice, in which professionals explore their experiences and draw up ideas and questions about practice.

The notion of the reflective practitioner has been influential in offering an alternative to grounding professional knowledge in what Schön termed technical-rationality (1983, p. 21). However, it has been questioned whether real life professional practice offers enough time for reflection-in-practice (Eraut, 1994). Furthermore, Lave and Wenger (1991) have located knowledge-in-practice not only in the individual but see it as distributed across groups of participants. Furthermore, Billet (2001) points out that knowing and learning are co-constructed through ongoing reciprocal processes involving interactions of individuals in workplaces. Billet also suggests that the verb *knowing* shifts the emphasis towards learning processes of thinking and acting and away from categories of knowledge as the outcome of thinking (Billet, 2001, p. 433).

Knowing-in-practice is a dynamic process based on collaboration, relationships, dialogue and reflection. Teacher learning then, following Kelly (2006), involves knowing-in-practice, which is distributed across participants in teaching situations and across the teachers’s community of practice (usually abbreviated to CoP). A CoP is defined by Wenger (1998) as a group of practitioners who share a domain of practice in which members participate in shared activities, discussions,

commitments, mutual help and knowledge generation and within which they construct identities. They share ways of speaking and writing about their practice. The members of a CoP share “repertoires, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short, shared practice” (Wenger, 2007). Thus processes of professional learning, identity formation, sense of belonging and knowledge creation are linked with the community of practice. The processes involved have been called by Lave (1996) social learning.

Teacher learning also involves the on-going construction and re-construction of teacher identities and positions. A teacher’s position along the trajectory from novice to expert involves shifts of identity, encounters with boundaries and engagement with intersections between positions (e.g., when roles overlap or conflict with each other). The teacher learning process entails the development of situated teacher identities. That means that one tends to become the kind of teacher afforded by the circumstances (Kelly, 2011). If these circumstances conflict with a person’s other identities, ideals or perhaps with her tacit knowledge, for example of teachers from her own school days, tensions can arise. Thus Kelly argues for professional development that encourages “robust reflective, discursive, collaborative and inclusive teacher identities” (Kelly, 2006, p. 515).

The situated nature of teacher identities means that a teacher moving from one class to another, or accompanying the same group of children over many years, or moving to another Waldorf school (or working with teachers in a different country) are all situations in which the teacher actually becomes a novice again. The difference between a “new” novice and an experienced teacher in a novel situation probably becomes visible by observing the time the teacher takes to acquire knowing-in-practice about how the new group best learns. This may mean being strict and form-giving in one situation or relaxed and allowing the pupils to shape lessons in another.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

This is a piece of practitioner research since the author is a practicing teacher in a Waldorf school in Germany, with 34 years of classroom experience. The study set out to explore the lived experiences (van Manen, 1990) of Waldorf teachers of their teacher learning in individual and collegial practices using a questionnaire and phenomenological interviews (Kvale, 1996). The participants were given a list of typical teacher learning situations (with a description of the activity since terminology varies) based on the author’s professional experience and asked to note their frequency of participation and to assess, using a scale, how effective they experienced these practices to be in terms of their teacher learning. Open questions were added inviting comment on any aspect not mentioned. Each participant was given a definition of teacher learning (the term is generally unfamiliar) and this was verbally explained in almost all cases. I defined teacher learning (also referred to in

the questionnaires as professional learning) as, “how teachers develop and learn in and through their profession.” I also added, that “I am particularly interested in how teachers continue learning about Steiner/Waldorf education and how they work with the curriculum.”

A qualitative approach was chosen because the aim of the study was to construct a representational picture (perhaps of mosaic character) based on the lived experiences of teachers expressed in their own everyday language about specific aspects of their practice (Kvale, 1996). Another way of putting it would be to say that the aim was to uncover “the actor’s point of view from within the social situation they occupy” (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989) and then interpret this using the theoretical frames described.

A questionnaire with open and closed questions was distributed to teachers from 14 different countries. Most of the participants were attending international conferences (in Hyderabad, India in 2010; Kassel, Germany, 2011; Dornach, Switzerland, 2012 and 2013; Seoul, S. Korea, 2013). In total some 160 teachers participated. However, due to the fact that the questionnaires were developed iteratively and some of the questions were later varied, only data from 115 questionnaires are collated in the tables below, that is, from identical questions. Only data from the open questions in the initial 45 questionnaires has been analysed, since they were all the same. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted to follow up some of the issues highlighted in the questionnaires. In total, transcripts from 24 interviews were used.

The sample was chosen purposively, which means that these teachers were included on the basis of the researcher’s judgement “of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought” (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011, p. 156). They were chosen because they were experienced (generally more than 10 years in a Waldorf school); included men and women (the majority of teachers attending these conferences were women); were primary and secondary teachers and they came from a wide range of countries. This was not a representative sample in the formal sense. However, the data provided a sufficient basis to support the experience of the author in formulating recommendations both for further research and for changes in practice.

Overall I followed Crotty’s (1998) three steps of hermeneutic analysis, starting with an empathetic approach to capture the teachers’s meanings, followed by an interactive approach in which the data was analyzed and discussed using the theoretical lens. Finally, I enacted a transactional stage, in which I respond as researcher and practitioner to the data. I followed Kvale’s (1996) approach to framing and analyzing phenomenological interviews, that is, by condensing transcripts to natural meaning units and identifying emergent themes, then grouping these thematically. The texts related to the open questions in the questionnaire were analyzed in the same way.

The questionnaire was in English and the interviews conducted in English, which is not the mother tongue of many participants, though all understood English. Therefore I did not attempt to analyze the language but rather focused on the thematic content. The answers to the closed questions were collated in the form of percentages and these were used in their general qualitative character (expressed in terms such as around half, most, some, a few) to give pointers to general frequencies.

My Positionality

My research position is one of critical insider, following Herr and Anderson's spectrum of positionality in action research (2005). Although this study is not a piece of action research, it is practitioner research and the role of critical insider is relevant. Thirty-four years in the profession as Waldorf teacher and about half that as teacher educator provides me with rich experience but may also risk bias. I certainly knew which questions to ask and which teachers to approach and I was able to read between the lines. If there was bias, then I suspect it lay in the motivation to make things, as I see them, better. I believe that my academic training in the education doctorate programme at the University of Plymouth has taught me to be both a reflective and critical insider.

Summary of the Outcomes of the Data Analysis

The data from the closed questions in the questionnaire is presented in tabulated form as percentages of the total sample. This is followed by a thematic summary.

Effectiveness of lesson review and planning

This question has been separated from the others for soliciting detailed comments. Responding to the question how effective teachers felt their lesson preparation is as a means of teacher learning, table one summarizes collated replies:

Table 1

Very helpful	Usually helpful	Sometimes helpful	Not helpful
38%	49%	21%	11%

Table 1: Experienced effectiveness of lesson preparation and review in relation to teacher learning (in relation to 115 questionnaires)

Taking the written comments and the mentions of lesson preparation and review in the interviews into account, the following three main themes were identified:

1. There is a strongly held view that lesson preparation and review are vital for teacher learning but it needs to be more focused, perhaps by using criteria.
2. Visualizing the pupils is an important part of lesson preparation.
3. This activity is related to pedagogical intuition.

I deal with the last two separately.

Visualizing

Visualizing the pupils and pedagogical situations plays an important role in lesson preparation by Waldorf teachers. Typical descriptions of this activity were

I try to imagine the face, then the child in movement or involved in an activity like painting or writing... sometimes I see the child interacting with others.

As a high school teacher I allow myself to imagine what the pupils felt during the lesson—often that shows in their reactions—but also the expression in their eyes—sometimes I know that these are my own reactions—I try to take account of these feelings on the next day.

It is sometimes difficult to create a picture of the child because there are so many impressions and I ask myself whether they are memories or whether I have imagined how the child might be, although I have never observed this exact situation. Over time, I have come to believe that this is not decisive—earlier I worried whether I was doing it right—now I rely on my own feeling whether this is appropriate.

This last quote highlights that the techniques and purpose of visualization are not well understood, given that this is deemed an essential activity for Waldorf teachers.

Links Between Lesson Review and Planning with Intuition

A number of points were made:

- Slightly more than half the participants linked lesson planning and reviewing with the experience of intuition in which “insights” into individuals or pedagogical situations occur, often in classroom situations.
- The range of responses matches the intuitive ways of knowing that Claxton (2000) categorizes; expertise, implicit learning, judgement, sensitivity, creativity and rumination (long-term low level reflection on particular issues). What each of these forms of knowing has in common is a lack of conscious, rational, analytical thinking. Rather they are holistic, in the sense that individual aspects are contextualized within a comprehensive interpretation of a complex situation.
- Many Waldorf teachers see pedagogical intuition as a reliable basis for pedagogical action and many express the feeling of “rightness” when they reflect on the intuitions they have experienced. The action or insight felt right at the time. This tends to affirm their “faith” in this form of knowing.

The following three examples mention many of the points made separately by others:

[Pedagogical intuition] is when the teacher gains particular insight into the specific needs of a class or an individual child and knows that she can work with to meet these needs. This can lead to changes in the curriculum and teaching methods and to changes in the children’s development.

[Pedagogical intuition] is like thinking on, or with, your feet. However tacit knowledge helps only if it is learned like an ability. If your experiences are rich then you can be flexible in your thinking. For me the most important thing is the experience that I do the right thing or say the right thing in order to help a child. When the insight turns out to be right, then I think one can speak of intuition.

You know what to do, but not necessarily why. I notice that when I change my lesson plan spontaneously and do something else—and it works wonderfully. I only understand the reason in the course of the next few days—if at all.

Frequency and Effectiveness of Various Teacher Learning Related Practices

Participants were asked in an open question to state the frequency of their participation in the various practices (e.g., daily, weekly, three times a year etc.). Secondly they were asked to assess how effective they experience these practices in relation to their teacher learning using a scale: very effective, usually effective, sometimes effective, not effective, not relevant or not practiced. Thirdly they were asked, in an open question and in the interviews, what would make this activity more effective.

The following table shows the total responses to the question as to how effective the practices are in relation to teacher learning (*partly* effective combines *usually* and *sometimes* effective). In the last column frequency has been generalized. The numbers are expressed as percentage of 115 responses. Items 1 to 5 are individual activities, 6 to 17 are collective or group activities.

Table 2

How effective do you experience the following practices in relation to your teacher learning?	Very effective	Partly effective	Not effective	Not relevant or not practiced	Frequency of practice
1. Lesson preparation and reviewing	38	49	28	4	daily
2. Feedback from a critical friend	24	9	0	67	occasional
3. Coaching/Mentoring*	0	0	0	0	
4. Self-evaluation (using	15	13	0	72	occasional

commonly agreed criteria)					
5. Self-study	57	43	0	0	ongoing
6. Peer-Evaluation (including intervention)	14	19	0	67	once a year
7. Class conferences of all the teachers working in a particular class	13	55	4	28	twice a year per class
8. Regular weekly pedagogical meetings of all the teachers	11	80	9	0	weekly
9. Regular weekly educational organisational meetings for all the teachers	8	88	7	0	weekly
10. School leadership meetings	36	58	6	0	weekly
11. Working in forms of dynamic delegation or mandates	33	28	0	27	weekly
12. Internal school-based professional development	12	65	5	18	once a year
13. External professional development	37	44	0	19	once a year
14. External conferences	22	31	0	47	once a year
15. Pupil case studies	46	12	0	42	3-4 times a year
16. Curriculum development	11	33	0	56	once a year
17. Practitioner or action research	6	0	0	94	occasional

Table 2: summary of the experienced effectiveness of various teacher learning practices

Some explanations:

- Coaching and mentoring appeared only to be used for the induction of new teachers, none of whom were represented in the sample.
- Class conferences: these are meetings attended by all the teachers who teach in a particular class in which teachers's experiences of the pupils are shared.
- Pedagogical conferences: these meetings involve of all the teachers in the school to discuss pedagogical activities and share experiences.
- School leadership meetings: this varies between schools but participation usually involves all permanent teachers, but may be a smaller group, sometimes referred to as the (internal) college of teachers.
- Dynamic delegation: this is a form of distributed leadership in which individuals or small group are delegated decision-making powers by the collegial group in a specific field of management e.g. teacher development, timetabling, pupil admissions etc.

Thematic Summaries of the Experiences of Teacher Learning Practices

Based on the analysis of the questionnaire data and the interviews, the following thematic statements can be made about these practices:

- Self-evaluation. This is felt to be very helpful but many teachers see the need for criteria and guidelines (“How do I know if what I am doing is right?”). Most teachers used only informal criteria (i.e., those they themselves felt were relevant). A few used checklists (e.g., from Avison, 2004).
- Self-study and self-development. This is seen as a core activity for teacher learning. Exchange and sharing are rare but wished for. Many teachers understood self-study in terms of personal as well as professional development.
- Peer-evaluation: This was felt by those who have experienced it (about a third) to be helpful. The main theme of their comments was that peer-evaluation. It requires trust and discretion, negotiated criteria, organized time and it has to involve all members of staff.
- Class-conferences. These were experienced as useful but such meetings were reported as being infrequent and sometimes poorly attended.
- Regular pedagogical meetings These are considered important in theory, though the meetings were described as being often poorly led, unfocused (they often include too many non-pedagogical issues that could be delegated), with too little time for deepening pedagogical themes and learning. In many schools attendance at these meetings is said to be poor and there are no sanctions for non-attendance. Some teachers in Australia and New Zealand, which are state funded and regulated, felt there was too much emphasis on management, documentation, obligatory attendance at meetings at which the content “was not pertinent to practice.”
- School leadership meetings. These are considered very important in relation to shared vision and collective identity, though the link to teacher learning was not identified by many participants.
- Professional development (internal or external continuing professional development- CPD). The most common view was that this can be effective when led by competent people, but is infrequent and could be more effective (except in Germany and the Netherlands, where the standard of CPD is considered high). In Germany it was suggested that relatively few teachers attend professional development courses, although a wide range was said to be available (I am not aware of any statistics on this).
- Practitioner research (including curriculum research). This is rarely practiced and so very few teachers had direct experience. Most felt it would be very useful but lacked the knowledge on how to go about it and doubted whether they would have time. Those few who had experience (usually as participants on MA programmes) stated that the research was very significant for their teacher learning.

- Pupil case studies (usually referred to in Waldorf schools as child studies, see Mitchell, 2012; Wiechert, 2012 a/2012b). When practiced these are experienced as very important locations of teacher learning but they are often not well-structured. It was felt that anthroposophical knowledge was lacking to interpret the children. A few teachers said that they experienced child study as very esoteric and exclusive and said this was a reason they didn't happen in their school any more or only rarely.

Preconditions for Teacher Learning: Thematic Summary

Four open questions in the questionnaire and in the interviews focused on what teachers felt were the preconditions for successful teacher learning. The emergent themes can be summarized as follows:

- An understanding of teacher learning (as defined in the study) is vital for the quality of the education. Many felt this was lacking in their teacher education and professional development.
- In the interviews all the teachers said that leadership is necessary to support teacher learning. Four of the 24 people interviewed said they thought one task of leadership was to ensure that people engaged in teacher learning activities.
- However, most teachers felt that activities related to teacher learning should be voluntary, non-regulated (though facilitated), and should be led by competent people.
- Teacher learning from self-study was considered more important in practice than group study, which was not felt to be particularly effective.
- Teacher learning was weakly associated with inquiry or knowledge generation and was strongly associated with other people communicating knowledge and in particular, mediating Waldorf knowledge.
- Mutual trust was the most commonly mentioned factor in collegial relations relating to teacher learning, along with good communication, good methods and adequate time.
- There was a marked awareness expressed in the interviews that some Waldorf “insiders” exercised influence by virtue of “possessing” and being able to articulate “Waldorf knowledge.” Sometimes this was seen by some as desirable (“We need more people who know how Waldorf works and who can tell us what to do”) whilst others saw this as a hindrance to collegiality and to sharing or developing knowledge.

Meditation and Contemplation

It is widely understood within the Steiner movement that teachers may use various meditative techniques introduced by Steiner as a form of inner preparation for teaching (Rawson, 2011). Two open questions in the questionnaire about the role of meditation and contemplation were followed up in the interviews, one asking them

to describe what they do; the other asking how they felt it relates to teacher learning.

Almost all teachers who responded practiced some kind of meditation or contemplation, with significant cultural variations of practice (Asian Waldorf teachers frequently practiced forms of yoga or Buddhist meditation). Meditation is understood as contributing both to self-development and professional development. Being a good teacher is seen as being someone in control, being centered, grounded and having clear thinking. The following quotations are typical examples of many comments on meditation.

It helps me focus; helps me find inner calm; gives me a stable centre to orientate myself to. Meditation helps me to be connected and grounded.

Meditation helps me to feel harmony and peace and be able to bring this mood to the children and helps me understand them better. It also enables me to experience the spiritual dimension of my work.

When I have problems or have to make difficult decisions I contemplate on them by making a mental image of the situation before I go to sleep.

Discussion

Reflection on the Study

The study is in many respects limited. The sample is small. This kind of questionnaire has its limitations when the issues are as complex as teacher learning, especially when the participants are asked to reflect on practices that vary from school culture to school culture and over time. In that respect, the interviews were more rewarding since more differentiated answers could be given. The interviews showed in fact how interested teachers were in talking about teacher learning.

In retrospect the biggest gap in the survey was that the questionnaires did not draw sufficient attention to aspects of identity. Most teachers interviewed made clear links between self-development, self-study and meditation but the relationship between self-development and teacher identity was vague. There was reference to getting in touch with a higher self, acting out of one's "I" or spirit; finding a reliable, stable centre. Because the question was not posed, I learned little about the tensions between self-expectations, the expectations of colleagues, parents and pupils and the self-image teachers have of themselves. My own experience suggests this is an important factor both for new and experienced teachers. New teachers frequently struggle to define for themselves what it means to be "a Waldorf teacher" ("How is one supposed to be and do all those things?"). Some parents and teachers

project high (in some cases unrealistically high) expectations of what Waldorf teachers are supposed to be (“She is not a real Waldorf teacher” or “He’s a good teacher but not Waldorf”). This is a complex phenomenon with much potential for conflict that would benefit from critical reflection.

There is some confusion within the Waldorf discourse about the nature of identity and individuality. The central role of the “I” as spiritual core of the individual in anthroposophy (Steiner’s term for knowledge of and through the human being) often dominates understandings of identity. This perspective may prevent a truly reflexive understanding of identity, not least in the context of the plurality and ambivalences of postmodern notions of identity.

The relevance of social learning theory and a socio-cultural approach in a Waldorf context

Some participants commented that the social learning approach appears to de-center the person in learning by stressing the situated and distributed nature of learning and identity. This is a view that does not align easily with the anthroposophical idea of the “I” as agentic core of individuality. This would require longer discussion but one can say that Lave and Wenger (1991) did not intend to reduce the significance of agency. Rather, in adopting a relational view of the person and learning, they claim that “it is by the theoretical process of de-centering in relational terms that one can construct a robust notion of ‘whole persons’ which does justice to the multiple relations through which persons define themselves in practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, pp. 53-4). The relational view within social learning theory looks at people embedded in networks of relationships because it is not possible to understand them isolated from those relationships. My own view is that social learning theory describes realities of social learning. It does not say how the whole human being is constituted. Anthroposophy, which does offer a comprehensive understanding of the human being as body, soul and spirit (concepts that could be translated easily into modern terminology), however, does not offer a coherent view on social learning, though Steiner was deeply interested in the relationship between the individual and social processes (Steiner, 1985). Steiner’s epistemology is essentially relational and does not separate subject and world, seeing both as mutually determining (Welburn, 2004). Thus I take the two theoretical perspectives as complementary.

Waldorf schools are evidently learning cultures and communities of practice, as described by Lave and Wenger (1991; Wenger, 1998). The informal and formal processes of induction through participation for new teachers fits this model well, especially in countries that lack prior formal teacher education. In countries where teachers attend some kind of Waldorf teacher education, either full time in an institution or part-time or school-based, the period of teacher education forms a

separate Community of Practice (CoP) and there may be tensions at the boundaries between the school as CoP and the teacher education institution seminar as CoP.

Learning, as Lave (1996, p. 161) defines it, is “an aspect of changing participation in changing practices.” She makes the point that the direction or movement of learning is always *becoming*. Thus teacher learning is becoming within the social practices of the CoP. Crafting teacher identities is also bound up with becoming knowledgeable skilled through participation in these social practices. As Lave puts it, “who you are becoming shapes crucially and fundamentally what you ‘know’” (Lave, 1996, p. 157). Teaching learning is the generation (and regeneration) of knowledgeable skill, identity and practice.

I suggest that teacher learning through participation in a CoP requires participants to be critically aware of the nature of those practices and how they evolve over time and place and how the persons involved transform themselves and are transformed. It is process-orientated precisely because it is a process of becoming and it is relational. Teacher learning is also essentially about facilitating pupil learning through the growth of knowledgeable skills and identity-making. Lave notes that a key task of educational research lies in establishing the “locations in which and the processes by which the most potent identity-constituting learning conjunctures occur...the key questions revolve around how to make pedagogic situations...effectively available to the school-specific, identity-changing participation of [pupils] together in their own lives” (Lave, 1996, p. 162). This is thus the primary task of the teacher collegiate in a Waldorf school.

Lave and Wenger’s social learning theory of participation, as Sfard (1998) points out, needs to be complemented by the metaphor of learning through the acquisition of concepts, which by definition are transferable. Situated learning through participation generally rules out or limits transfer, since one cannot transfer the situation in which knowing is embedded. In terms of Waldorf teacher learning, the process of becoming in a CoP, as just outlined, needs to be periodically reflected and conceptualized. This is necessary to facilitate the mutual fructifying *between* communities of practice, that is, between schools. However, if I work with a Waldorf school in Bangalore, I cannot mediate the practices grown in my school in Germany (though I suspect many colleagues would). Concepts, however, can be transferred but they need to be planted as seeds to grow into local forms, just as artefacts and systems have to be adapted to local conditions. The danger lies in transferring unmodified practice without critical reflection. This is a complex issue but one of the most obvious risks is that of superficiality. Steiner education in (upwardly mobile, cosmopolitan) Bangalore needs to respond to the local social context, otherwise it merely becomes another form of modern nomadic information gathering (Hastedt, 2009)—a bricolage of bits and pieces, an inartistic patchwork. Practice needs to grow in situ.

The same is true when a school periodically (at least annually in my experience) reflects on its own practice. Through reflection, conclusions may be formed that may be articulated as emergent concepts or provisional living theories in the sense used by McNiff and Whitehead (2010). These may be subsequently applied to reflect on new practice and out of this new practice new concepts can emerge. This is an iterative process with cycles of participation in practice followed by episodes of reflection using those new concepts as theoretical lens or evaluation using living theories as criteria.

Outcomes

In some respects the picture that emerges from this survey is relatively clear. These Waldorf teachers see teacher learning as essential, though many feel they lack support in terms of techniques of individual and collective learning. The study confirms my previous studies (Rawson, 2011/2014) in suggesting that teacher learning is very much left to individual initiative and that collective forms of teacher learning such as pedagogical meetings are not particularly effective in facilitating learning, generating knowledge or enhancing processes of reflection. The need to generate new knowledge is not strongly expressed. Rather there is the expectation that the existing Waldorf body of knowledge, comprising Steiner, Waldorf secondary literature and traditions of practice, contains most of what needs to be known. It only needs, as it were, to be unpacked and applied. Indeed in the interviews, several teachers expressed a wish to have better access to the Waldorf body of knowledge through mediation by “experts.” Expertise is understood as a property of individuals and transferable as know-how. This is preferred to knowledge they generate themselves through reflection or collaborative teacher research. The idea that practitioner research can be a way of generating knowledge is recognized but few teachers know how to do it, and even fewer actually practice it. Finally there is ambiguity about the status of Waldorf or anthroposophical knowledge and whether this can be generated or only derived from reading Steiner or accounts of Steiner’s ideas.

Meditative practice

Kelly’s notion of teacher learning involves an iterative process of evolving understandings in pedagogical situations. I suggest that the various practices aimed at increasing pedagogical awareness typical of Waldorf teacher practice belong to teacher learning in a Waldorf context. Visualizing children or pedagogical situations is a common practice among Waldorf teachers and most teachers in this survey mentioned that they do this. I believe that most Waldorf teachers learn about this in their teacher training. They learn that it should be done in a mood of reverence and open inquiry and may be accompanied by a meditative text by Steiner. To my knowledge, there is no formal explanation for this practice or even details about

how it should be done, though Wiechert (2010/2012) has recently published (in German) an account of this activity. According to the data in this study, it appears to be based on an act of faith and strong personal conviction. Since it relates in many ways to contemplative or meditative practice, I will address these together.

Meditative and contemplative practice also have the aim of increasing awareness and sensitivity within pedagogical practices. In meditation or contemplative practice (Zajonc, 2009), an image is constructed representing an experience in the world and this is contemplated and internalized. This may then subsequently alter the way we experience the world. It can predispose us to notice certain things or to act in certain ways. This can be experienced as intuition, in the sense that Claxton (2000) uses the term. Pedagogical intuition can be understood as relational in that it arises out of the subject's engagement with a particular situation or with other people. This engagement is not simply cognitive. It involves bodily experiences, feelings, intentions and actions embedded in social practices common to all participants.

Identifying and selecting an image of the situation and using this as a focus for meditative practice, may draw subject and object/image into a more conscious relationship. I suggest that in this process the subject-world relations are bound up together. The act of visualizing or contemplation intensifies and potentially modifies the existing relations, not merely intellectually but bodily, intentionally and emotionally. This process sensitizes us on the one hand to the actual relationships and may change them in intentional ways. This affects how we act and what we perceive when we meet the person or situation again, which is what is experienced as intuition. As I have written elsewhere (Rawson, 2012), this is why contemplative practice requires both ethical awareness and critical reflection.

Thus, I see visualizing, contemplation and pedagogical intuition as an aspect of knowing-in-practice. As Claxton (2000) notes

...one of the most striking ways in which intuition differs from intellect is in the range of voices through which it speaks. Whereas the rational mind seeks articulate clarity, intuition reveals itself through channels, which are hazier and more indirect. (Claxton, 2000, p. 46)

Claxton makes the point that aesthetic, physical, environmental and emotional sensitivity are forms of cognition, "they are valid ways of knowing that, properly understood and well-developed, do not subvert rational thought but complement it" (Claxton, 2000, p. 47).

The notion of pedagogical intuition is by no means a new idea. It closely resembles what van Manen calls pedagogical tact. He describes (1990, p. 40) pedagogical thoughtfulness, sensibility or tact, as the ability to both grasp the essence of a complex pedagogical situation, such as understanding a child and being

able to act appropriately. According to van Manen (2008) pedagogical tact or sensitivity is

...itself largely tied into pathic knowledge. Teacher practical knowledge is pathic to the extent that the act of practice depends on the sense and sensuality of the body, personal presence, relational perceptiveness, tact for knowing what to say and do in contingent situations, thoughtful routines and actions, and other aspects of knowledge that are in part pre-reflective, pre-theoretic, pre-linguistic. (van Manen, 2008, p. 19)

Van Manen has argued that tact is a form of practical acting in which knowing becomes thoughtful action (van Manen, 1995, p. 43). My own view is that pedagogical tact and cultivating intuition are both preconditions and outcomes of teacher learning involving visualizing and contemplation. The sensitivity required to read the situation we are situated within, pick up on distributed knowledge and be able to grasp complexity in action seems to combine reflection and knowing-in-practice.

Recommendations

What all this may mean for Waldorf teacher education and teacher learning can be briefly and provisionally summarized as follows:

- The development of learning cultures that include methods of practitioner research is important. Kelly (2011) has shown that without sound reflection techniques there is a risk that teachers are predisposed by their own embodied experiences to privilege some students against others, or to adopt inappropriate identities. Teachers should practice systematic reflexivity about their positions, their assumptions, their sets of understandings or about power relations within schools, between teachers, between teachers and pupils and parents.
- Autonomy is both a strength and a weakness. There is a marked ambivalence about teacher learning being managed or regulated, though more guidance and organizational structure are wished for. Flat collegial structures make internal regulation difficult, which, as Bush (2011) has noted, is the weakness of collegial leadership. Autonomy at school level makes sense, not only at teacher level. Therefore each school will have to find a responsible balance of freedom and regulation regarding teacher learning.
- More study in schools needs to be focused on how teaching impacts on pupil learning. As Hattie (2012) identified in his meta-study on learning in schools, teacher learning is what matters in regard to pupil learning: “The remarkable feature of the evidence is that the greatest effects on student learning occur when teachers become learners of their own teaching...and the most powerful

way of thinking about a teacher's role is for teachers to see themselves as evaluators of their effects on students" (Hattie, 2012, p. 18).

- Since visualizing and meditative practice is so central to Waldorf teacher practice it perhaps needs a more secure theoretical and practical basis, with induction into methods.
- Work needs to be done to relate the anthroposophical view of the developing human being to practical practitioner research methods. The boundaries that seem like barriers between anthroposophy and social science need deconstructing and de-mystifying.
- Given the lack of awareness of identity it may help if forms biographical learning forms (Alheit & Dausien, 2010) are developed in support of teacher learning.
- All these skills need to be introduced and practiced by students and tutors in initial teacher education. Indeed, the Waldorf movement needs to reconsider its pedagogy of teacher education. As Korthagen (2010) points out, although the idea of situated learning has been around a long time, teacher educators seem to forget that educational knowledge cannot simply be "transmitted" to teachers, but rather situated learning means that "learning emerges from our own actions in relation to others" (Korthagen, 2010, p. 99).

It is my conviction that the educational approach in Waldorf schools based on collegial methods of knowledge generation and self-development can provide an excellent basis for developing pedagogical skills and knowledge. It has been my experience that some very talented teachers choose to work in Waldorf schools because of the opportunities for pedagogical creativity and autonomy. If this important contribution to overall educational practice and discourse is to flourish and develop, it needs a more effective teacher learning than currently exists in many places. Collegial school autonomy, for all its weaknesses, is nevertheless a model of counter practice (Biesta 1998) that shows that the way things are (in education today) is not the only possible way.

References

- Alheit, P., & Dausien, B. (2010). Bildungsprozesse über die Lebensspanne: Zur Politik und Theorie lebenslangen Lernens. [Learning and self-formation processes over the life course: Concerning the politics and theory of lifelong learning]. In R. Tippelt and B. Schmidt (eds.), *Handbuch Bildungsforschung* (3rd. Revised edition. pp. 713-734). Wiesbaden: Springer.
- Avison, K. (2004) *A Handbook for Waldorf Class Teachers*. 2nd. Edition. Forest Row: Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship Publications.
- Ball, S. J. (2008). *The education debate*. Bristol: Policy Press.
- Ball, S. J. (2012). *Global Education inc. New policy networks and the neo-liberal imaginary*. London: Routledge.
- Bauman, Z. (2007). *Liquid times: Living in an age of uncertainty*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Biesta, G. J. J. (1998). Say you want a revolution...suggestions for the impossible future of critical pedagogy. *Educational Theory*, 48(4), 499-510.
- Billet, S. (2001). Knowing in practice: Re-conceptualising vocational expertise. *Learning and Instruction*, 11(6), 431-452.
- Bourdieu, P. & Wacquant, L. (1992). *An invitation to reflexive sociology*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Brater, M. (2013). Zur Qualität von Waldorfschulen, ihrer Entwicklung und Sicherung.[Concerning quality development and assurance in Waldorf schools] In D. Randoll & M. da Veiga (Eds.), *Waldorfpädagogik in Praxis und Ausbildung: Zwischen Tradition und notwendigen Reformen*. [Waldorf pedagogy and teacher training: Between tradition and necessary reform]. Wiesbaden: Springer.
- Bush, T. (2011). *Theories of educational leadership and management*. (4th ed.). London: Sage.
- Claxton, G. (2000). The anatomy of intuition. In T. Atkinson & G. Claxton (Eds.), *The intuitive practitioner: On the valuing of not always knowing what you are doing* (pp. 32-52). Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2011). *Research methods in education* (7th ed.). London: Routledge.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. London: Sage.
- da Veiga, M. (2006). Die diskursfähigkeit der Waldorfpädagogik und ihre bildungsphilosophischen Grundlagen. Ein Essay. [The ability of discourse of Waldorf pedagogy and its philosophy of education]. In H. P. Bauer & P. Schneider (Eds.), *Waldorfpädagogik: Perspektiven eines wissenschaftlichen Dialogs* (Vol. 1). [Waldorf Pedagogy: Perspectives of a scientific dialogue]. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.

- da Veiga, M., & Randoll, D. (Eds.). (2013). *Waldorfpädagogik in Praxis und Ausbildung: Zwischen Tradition und notwendigen Reformen*. [Waldorf pedagogy and teacher training: Between tradition and necessary reform]. Wiesbaden: Springer.
- Dahlin, B. (2010). Steiner Waldorf education, social-threefolding and civil society: Education as cultural power. *RoSE: Research on Steiner Education*, 1(1), 49-59.
- Eraut, M. (1994). *Developing professional knowledge and competence*. London: Falmer.
- Eraut, M. (2000). Non-formal learning, implicit learning and tacit knowledge in professional work. In F. Coffield (Ed.), *The necessity of informal learning* (pp. 12-31). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Gladstone, F. (1997). *Republican academies: Rudolf Steiner on self-management, experiential study and self-education in the life of a college of teachers*. Forest Row: Steiner Schools Fellowship Publications.
- Götte, W. M. (2006). *Erfahrungen mit Schulautonomie: Das Beispiel der Freien Waldorfschulen*. [Experiences of school autonomy. The example of the Waldorf schools]. Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben.
- Halász, G., & Michel, A. (2011). Key competences in Europe: Interpretation, policy formulation and implementation. *European Journal of Education*, 46(3), 289-306.
- Hastedt, H. (2009). *Moderne Nomaden. Erkundungen*. [Modern Nomads. An Inquiry]. Vienna: Passagen Verlag.
- Hattie, J. A. C. (2012). *Visible learning for teachers: Maximizing impact on learning*. London: Routledge.
- Herr, K., & Anderson, G. L. (2005). *The action research dissertation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Hitchcock, G., & Hughes, D. (1989). *Research and the teacher*. London: Routledge.
- Kelly, P. (2006). What is teacher learning? A socio-cultural perspective. *Oxford Review of Education*, 32(4), 505-519.
- Kelly, P. (2011). Unconsidered activity, craft expertise and reflective practice in teaching. *Reflexive Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, 12(4), 557-568.
- Korthagen, F. A. J. (2010). Situated learning theory and the pedagogy of teacher education: Towards an integrative view of teacher behavior and teacher learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26, 98-106.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lave, J. (1996). Teaching as learning in practice. *Mind, Culture and Activity*, 3(3), 149-164.

- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lenzen, D. (2014). *Bildung statt Bologna!* Berlin: Ullstein.
- McNiff, J., & Whitehead, J. (2010). *You and your action research project* (3rd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Mitchell, D. (Ed.). (2012). *Observing the class, observing the children* (Vol. 18). Chatham, NY: AWSNA.
- Nida-Rümelin, J. (2013) *Philosophie einer humanen Bildung*. [A Philosophy of human-centred education]. Hamburg: Edition Körber Stiftung.
- Rawson, M. (2010). *Educational quality development in Steiner Waldorf schools*. Eindhofen: Mercurius International.
- Rawson, M. (2011). Democratic leadership in Waldorf schools. *Research in Waldorf Education*, 2(2), 1-15.
- Rawson, M. (2012). Contemplative practice and intuition in a collegial context: An action research project in a Waldorf school. *Research Bulletin of Waldorf Research Institute*, 17(1), 47-54.
- Rawson, M. (2014). Ein Märchen aus dem modernen Amerika. [A modern American fairy tale]. *Erziehungskunst*, 5, 44-47.
- Rawson, M. & Richter, T. (2000). *The educational aims and content of the Steiner Waldorf curriculum*. Forest Row, UK: Steiner Schools Fellowship Publications.
- Rawson, M. & Swann, J. (2000). *Self-management in Steiner Waldorf schools*. Forest Row: Steiner Waldorf Schools Fellowship Publications.
- Rawson, M. (2008). Quality development through action research. *Erziehungskunst: Zeitschrift zur Pädagogik Rudolf Steiners*, 8(4), 425-428.
- Rittelmeyer, C. (2012). *Bildung. Ein pädagogischer Grundbegriff*. [Bildung. A foundational pedagogical concept]. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Schön, D. (1983). *The reflective practitioner*. New York: Basic Books.
- Serres, M. (2013). *Erfinde euch neu! Eine Liebeserklärung an die vernetzte Generation*. [Invent yourself anew! A declaration of love to the networked generation]. Originally published in French as *Petit Poucette*, 2012. Paris: Editions Le Pommier]. Berlin: Suhrkamp.
- Sfard, A. (1998). On two metaphors of learning and the dangers of choosing just one. *Educational Researcher*, 27, 4-13.
- Steiner, R. (1985). *The renewal of the social organism*. Spring Valley, NY: Anthroposophic Press.
- Steiner, R. (1996a). *The foundations of human experience*. Hudson, NY: Anthroposophic Press.
- Steiner, R. (1996b). *The education of the child and early lectures on education*. Hudson, NY. Anthroposophic Press.

- Steinkellner, C. (2012). *Menschenbildung in einer globalisierten Welt. Perspektiven einer zivilgesellschaftlichen Selbstverwaltung unserer Bildungsräume*. [Bildung in a globalized world. Perspectives on self-administration of educational institutions within civil society]. Berlin: Edition Immanente.
- van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Albany, NY: The State University of New York Press.
- van Manen, M. (2008). Pedagogical sensitivity and teachers's practical knowing-in-action. *Peking University Education Review*, 1, 2-20.
- Welburn, A. (2004). *Rudolf Steiner's philosophy and the crisis of contemporary thought*. Edinburgh: Floris Books.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning and identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wenger, E. (2007). *Communities of practice. A brief introduction*. Retrieved 29 July 2014 from <http://www.ewenger.com/theory/>
- Wiechert, C. (2012a). The art of observing children. In D. Mitchell (Ed.), *Observing the class. Observing the children* (pp. 13-16). Chatham, NY: AWSNA Publications
- Wiechert, C. (2012b). "Du sollst sein Rätsel lösen": Gedanken zur Kunst der Kinder- und Schülerbesprechung. ["You should solve the riddle of the child." Thoughts about the art of pupil case studies]. Dornach: Verlag am Goetheanum.
- Woods, G. J. & Woods, P. A. (2008). Democracy and spiritual awareness: Interconnections and implications for educational leadership. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 13(2), 101-116.
- Woods, P. A. & Woods, G. J. (2012). Degrees of democracy: A holistic framework. *Journal of School Leadership*, 22(4), 1-20.
- Zajonc, A. (2009). *Meditation as contemplative inquiry: When knowing becomes love*. Great Barrington, MA: Lindesfarne.
- Zech, M. M. (2013). Waldorfschulen als Beispiel gelebter Schulautonomie auf dem freien Markt. [Waldorf schools as examples of living school autonomy in a free market]. In D.Randoll & M. da Veiga (Eds.), *Waldorfpädagogik in Praxis und Ausbildung: Zwischen Tradition und notwendigen Reform* (pp. 11-24). [Waldorf pedagogy in practice and in teacher training: Between tradition and necessary reform]. Wiesbaden: Springer.

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my thanks to Helen Lees, the Editor of Other Education and the referees who gave very helpful feedback.

Author Details

Martyn Rawson has been a practicing Waldorf teacher for 34 years. He also teaches on the Masters Programme in Waldorf Education at the Waldorfseminar Kiel, a co-operation partner with the Freie Hochschule Stuttgart, Germany. Martyn is completing a Professional Education Doctorate at the University of Plymouth, UK. Contact address: Eichenweg, 26, 25358 Horst, Germany. Email: martyn.rawson@plymouth.ac.uk



This work by Martyn P. Rawson is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/)